



**Department of  
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# News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 27, 2006

## **VA and HHS to Target Diabetes, Obesity among American Veterans** *Veterans Are More Likely to Have Diabetes*

WASHINGTON – With obesity and deadly diabetes at significantly higher levels among America's veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have announced a coordinated campaign to educate veterans and their families about ways to combat these health issues.



Joining Nicholson at the Monday announcement the Washington's National Press Club are VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Jonathan Perlin (Left), Health and Human Services Secretary Michael O. Leavitt (center right) and U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona (far right).

"Inactive lifestyles and unhealthy eating habits can cause needless suffering for America's veterans," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "Obesity and diabetes are major threats to the health and lifestyles of our veterans, deserving a robust campaign to better educate them on healthy habits."

Veterans are more likely than the general population to have diabetes, one of the major complications associated with being overweight. According to the American Diabetes Association, 7 percent of the U.S. population has diabetes, and the rate increases with age. Among veterans receiving VA health care, who are on average older than the general population, the rate is 20 percent.

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*Commemorating 75 Years of Service*

## Diabetes and Obesity 2/2/2/2

“Central to our goal of controlling the cost of health care is the promotion of wellness, fitness and the prevention of chronic disease. We are working to encourage Americans to adopt a healthy lifestyle and to take responsibility for making wise choices to improve their fitness and health,” said HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt.

In a news conference here today, Secretary Nicholson, HHS Secretary Leavitt, Surgeon General Dr. Richard H. Carmona and VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin announced the start of a campaign called “HealthierUS Veterans” – a multi-pronged educational effort to spawn healthy eating and physical activity among veterans, their families and members of their communities.

VA medical centers will promote nutrition and exercise with local groups in 40 communities that receive grants from HHS in a program called “Steps to a HealthierUS.”

"Our service men and women are known for their extraordinarily high levels of fitness," said Perlin. "We want our veterans to be identified the same way."

Overweight patients receiving VA health care may participate in weight loss programs tailored to their needs. They may also receive pedometers, diet advisories and “prescriptions” suggesting how much to walk -- or, in the case of wheelchair users, how much to roll.

The two secretaries also plan to kick off regional educational campaigns this spring in four cities where VA and HHS Steps programs collaborate. Local celebrities and members of veterans service organizations will be invited to participate.

In May, the "HealthierUS Veterans" program will participate with the President's Council on Physical Fitness during the council's annual rally in Washington.

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